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NEWS RELEASE

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Thirty-Three State Judges Evaluated on Courtroom Performance

Chief Justice Ronald Moon last week released the eighth Judicial Performance Program report that provides the results of performance evaluations of 33 judges. Overall, the judges performed well in the areas evaluated.

For the first time, the report included pictographs displaying frequency distributions of the individual judges' ratings, where comparative rankings were provided for circuit court, family court, and per diem judges.

In circuit court, 10 judges were evaluated and their mean scores were: 4.0 in the Legal Ability section; 4.1 in Judicial Management Skills; 4.3 for Comportment; and 4.1 in the Settlement and/or Plea Agreement Ability section. These scores were based on a scale of possible responses ranging from one for Poor to five for Excellent.

The average score for eight full-time family court judges in the Legal Ability section was 4.0. Their mean scores in other areas were: 4.0 for Judicial Management Skills; 4.0 for Comportment; and 3.9 for Settlement and/or Plea Agreement Ability. These scores were also based on a scale of possible responses ranging from one to five.

Fifteen per diem judges were evaluated and their average scores were: 3.9 for Legal Ability; 3.8 for Settlement and/or Plea Agreement Ability; and 4.0 for Judicial Management Skills. In these three sections, per diem judges could receive scores ranging from one to five, the same as circuit court and full-time family court judges. However, the Legal Ability and Judicial Management Skills sections for per diem judges have fewer questions than those for the circuit court and full-time family court judges. Therefore, comparing scores of circuit and family court judges with those of per diem judges is misleading. The Judge's Characteristics section in the per diem questionnaire had an average score of 3.3, based on possible responses ranging from a score of one for Strongly Disagree to four for Strongly Agree.

As in the past, the judges evaluated in this report were or will be interviewed by the Judicial Evaluation Review Panel. The nine panel members are Robert Alm, Momi Cazimero, Lawrence Foster, Lynne Kaneshiro, Douglas McNish, Willson Moore, Jr., Herbert Shimabukuro, Betty Vitousek, and Eric Yamamoto. They are organized into groups of three to counsel judges from the circuit court, family court, and district court, including per diem members. Each panel consists of one former judge, one non-practicing attorney, and one member of the public knowledgeable in the law.

All eight reports on the Judicial Performance Program are available to the Judicial Selection Commission. Scores and attorney comments received for individual judges are also available to the Commission upon request.

All currently eligible justices and full-time judges have now been evaluated at least once. Most judges have received two or more evaluations since the program began.

Chief Justice Moon established Hawaii's Judicial Performance Program, one of only 13 such programs in the nation, as a permanent program in September 1993. The program's main goals are to: improve individual judges' performances; increase the efficiency of judicial management within the Judiciary; and provide the Judicial Selection Commission with a potential source of information for retention and promotion decisions.

Copies of the "Eighth Report on the Judicial Performance Program" are available at the Supreme Court Law Library on O`ahu and at the Circuit Court law libraries on the islands of Hawai'i, Maui, and Kaua'i.

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